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CHARGE

DELIVERED

TO THE

CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF EXETER,

AT THE

PRIMARY VISITATION

OF

HENRY REGINALD, ^K*Courtenay*

LORD BISHOP OF EXETER.

1799.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CLERGY.

EXETER:

PRINTED BY TREWMAN AND SON, HIGH-STREET.

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PRINTED BY J. B. L. AND CO. NEWCASTLE.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

CALLED by his Majesty's gracious favor to a station of eminence in the profession to which I belong, I must naturally feel a peculiar satisfaction in being sent into a Diocese where my name and connections have so long been known; and where so many honest prejudices concur to rivet my attachment. But this satisfaction is considerably checked, by a recollection of the loss you have sustained in the Prelate whom it is my lot to follow. Independent of those personal qualifications which might entitle him to your esteem and affection, he possessed also the same local advantages to which I have alluded in regard to myself. He had quitted a station in many respects more advantageous and lucrative, to return to a country which was the seat of his ancestors, and where his first and earliest connections had been formed: and he brought with him talents eminently fitted for

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the high station he came to, and a knowledge of business which the habits of great part of his life had particularly enabled him to acquire: he brought also a disposition to exert those talents and that knowledge for the welfare of his Diocese; and he had the satisfaction of knowing, from personal experience, that he was coming more immediately among those, from whose diligence and information he would be enabled to reap every assistance towards the important charge he had undertaken.

Scarcely, however, had he begun to enter upon that charge, when it pleased God to interrupt his prospects, by some of the severest trials to which humanity is liable. He saw the promising hopes of his family repeatedly cut off; and was only relieved from the weight of one sudden and afflicting stroke, to be plunged into the lingering expectation of another. Even after this second loss, his domestic anxieties and apprehensions were not at end; nor could they even be wholly counterbalanced by the satisfaction which he justly derived from other parts of his family, without interruption, and without allay. Those who saw him amidst these heavy afflictions will bear witness that he was not wanting to his duty on the awful occasion. He knew that "he had nothing which he had not received;*" and that if "he received good at the hand of God, it became him to receive evil also.†"

But

* 1 Cor. c. iv. v. 7.

† Job. c. ii. v. 10.

But while the Christian supported himself, as he ought, in humble resignation to the Almighty, the man sunk under the trial; and after a short struggle, he followed his beloved children to the grave.

The recollection of these events, naturally suggested by our present meeting, may afford an useful lesson to us all. If there be any of you who look up with envy and repining towards those situations in your profession, which you may think are marked with too much distinction, and which are supposed to bring with them more of the indulgences and enjoyments of this world, let them consider how small a proportion those indulgences and enjoyments can bear with respect to those more substantial blessings, which it is equally in your power to receive; and if it shall have pleased the Almighty to have dispensed them to you, how much the balance is in your favor! Or should the splendor of worldly pre-eminence, attached to those situations, be supposed capable of dazzling the eyes, and corrupting the minds of those who enjoy them, surely the effect of that conceit must speedily be checked by the contemplation of those severe afflictions to which we are all equally liable, and from which no rank or situation can defend us.

But the properest and most effectual use we can make of these events, is not only to wean ourselves from this world, by considering how frail and uncertain is all the happiness it holds

holds out, but at the same time to give to that happiness all the stability of which it is capable, by the consciousness of doing our duty, to the best of our abilities, in our respective stations. God grant that we may make this use of them! and thus secure to ourselves that recompence in another life, which alone can make amends for those various inequalities, of what nature soever, which are incident to our situation in this world.

In hopes of forwarding such endeavors, I am called upon by the present occasion to review with you some of the particulars of the duties arising from our profession; to correct your errors; to stimulate your zeal; to animate your perseverance; and to suggest such reflections and admonitions as either the general nature of your calling, or the peculiar circumstances of the times, may seem to render necessary. And here, however trite the subject may be thought, how often soever it may be repeated in almost every Charge of every Bishop; yet it is impossible to omit that on which all your other duties principally depend, namely, a residence on your proper cures. The ill effects of a too general and indiscriminate neglect of this duty, are incalculable; and should it increase, will be found sooner or later to contribute largely with other concurring causes, to the ruin of that establishment which it is our duty and our wish to support. I shall, however, dwell the less on this topic, because my particular sentiments upon it,

It, more fully detailed on a former occasion, although in another Diocese, have been given to the public. I will only add to what is there said, that in my opinion, no extraordinary zeal, no peculiar talent exerted either in preaching, or any other particular branch of duty, can compensate for the want of that pastoral care and superintendence which is the most essential point in our ecclesiastical constitution. Whatever indulgences therefore may be granted to age or infirmity, to narrowness of income, or to peculiar circumstances of family and situation, I confess I have but little for those who desert "that congregation wherein they are appointed to serve,"* under the plea of doing more good elsewhere.

Indeed those who conscientiously establish themselves upon their cures, and endeavor to execute with fidelity the important charge committed to them, are deserving of every protection which can be afforded them. It is to be lamented, therefore, whensoever they are broke in upon by any establishment within their parish, which appears to authorize any other person to interfere with the spiritual concerns of it, without being subject to their controul. Whatever authority these persons may have, it must be in some degree partial and limited; they are not, either solely or in conjunction, the pastors of the flock; those, therefore, who are introduced in any shape into another man's parish, ought to be careful to

confine

* See the Ordination Service.

confine themselves to those duties and services to which they are licensed, and in no way to intrench upon the regular, appointed Minister. It must on the other hand be remembered, that although these establishments may perhaps in their general principle be traced to schism and dissention, yet that schism on which they were founded is now pretty well worn out and obliterated; that many of them may lay claim to a better origin, namely, the piety of our ancestors, and frequently the wants and convenience of an extensive parish; and that the persons appointed to them having a legal sanction, are entitled to protection and support in their just rights. In many of these cases, however, there will be great room for the exercise of temper and discretion between the parties; and the proper line of conduct towards each other can only be derived from a true Christian spirit, teaching them to respect each others claims, and co-operate as far as possible in the promotion of the common cause in which they are engaged.

It will be evident, that what has been hitherto said, relates principally to Chapels and Lectures, established under some endowment. Something of the same reasoning will be applicable to stipendiary Curates. They are undoubtedly, when under the Bishop's Licence, entitled to his protection, against wanton removal, or too mean a provision: nor should this Licence be omitted (except in very peculiar cases), in any living

living where the Incumbent does not reside, and the Curate is not beneficed. But it must be remembered, that in cases where they have declined to put themselves under the Bishop's jurisdiction by a Licence, or in which he does not think fit to enforce their doing it, the contract remains merely personal; and they have no claim to his interference. In those instances also where they have acknowledged his jurisdiction, care must however be taken that the claims of the Rector to the management of his own concerns be not unnecessarily infringed. It is to be hoped, therefore, that differences of this sort may in general be accommodated between the parties by mutual candor and concession: or, that where an appeal is made to the Bishop, it may be made not in hostility, but in amicable reference. And even where the Curate finds himself ill-treated, and obliged to have recourse to authority, it is still incumbent on him to avoid faction, and by no means form a party in the parish against his Rector, in support of his quarrel. Such a conduct will not only best entitle him to protection in his just claims, but be most likely to recommend him also to notice and advancement. Before I quit this subject, there is one thing which I wish to recommend to the attention both of Incumbents and Curates, because I find it pretty much neglected in this Diocese; namely, that the Curate should neither be dismissed, nor retire from the Cure to which he has been licenced, or upon which he has been or-

dained, without acquainting the Bishop with it; stating the reasons for the removal; and if he goes to another Cure in the Diocese, applying to have his Licence endorsed. Without this it is impossible for the Bishop to know who are employed in his Diocese, and how the Cures are filled.

As to those, who, without any authorized call or legal sanction, obtrude themselves into other person's Cures, I conceive they neither act according to the principles of our Church Establishment, nor of Christianity itself. Whatever they may profess, and whatever zeal they may pretend for that Church of which they are called Members, and the emoluments of which they are ready to receive, they are in fact, Dissenters; not such as conscientiously differing in points of doctrine or worship, can still live among us in the principles of Christian love and charity; but Dissenters of the worst kind; enemies in the guise of friends; drawing off the congregation from those to whom they ought to listen, and promoting faction and schism where peace and harmony ought to prevail.

Where these men violate the laws of their country by such intrusion, they ought to be resisted, and taught to respect them; but this resistance may still be made without seeking to gratify private resentment, or departing from the spirit of peace.

Indeed

Indeed the best and most effectual way of resisting any intrusion, is by a diligent and conscientious discharge of duty in the Incumbent. If he is negligent or even remiss and languid in the performance of it, no wonder that many will be attracted by the superior zeal and activity of others, however indiscreetly, or even mischievously applied; much more, if any part of it should be directed to supply his defects. Here then we must again recur to the advantages not only of residence, but of a residence accompanied by an affectionate concern for the welfare of his parishioners; an attention to find out, and a readiness to relieve their spiritual wants; above all, to instruct the young and ignorant; to bring down to the level of all understandings the important truths of the Gospel; and to convey to them both the threatenings and the promises of it in such a manner, as to rouse and engage their affections, without inflaming their passions. Such a conduct as this must at all times be suitable to the nature of a Christian Ministry. And whatever praise may be due to those, who, in particular stations, either from the pulpit or the press, have set themselves in array to meet the repeated and persevering attacks of the enemies of our salvation; to refute their sophistry, to detect their fallacies, and to drag them to light under whatever veil they might wish to be concealed: whatever praise may be due to these champions of our Holy Faith, (and much certainly is due) yet in addressing the bulk of you I have pre-

ferred insisting on a more general topic, and I may venture to assert, that the effects of that sobriety of conduct, and that pastoral care and diligence, which I have been recommending, will not be lost, even in these days.

Yet let it not be supposed, that in making this distinction, I mean to undervalue the assistance of human learning in the discharge of the ministerial function; or to countenance the notion, already too common, that altho' it may be an ornamental, it is not a necessary qualification. Moral integrity, we are sometimes told, is sufficient for a Parish Priest. No doubt, a good moral life, exempt from the grosser vices, and holding out a decent example in the common intercourse of society, is absolutely required as the foundation on which the whole superstructure must be built: but he who rests there, has gone but a little way indeed, in qualifying himself for the service of the Altar. It can hardly be necessary to observe, that to this Pagan morality must be added the graces and endowments of Christianity; the moderation, forbearance, and charity inculcated in the Gospel; a due sense of our own weakness, and a firm reliance on the merits and intercession of Christ. Yet hence, on the other hand, arises in the minds of some men, a notion of I know not what Evangelical righteousness, totally distinct from that moral virtue which is properly a part of it, and attainable by some secret and undefined communication with the Deity. Upon this system, it is not by its fruits that we are to know in whom the spirit resides, but by some mysterious

terious and internal experience. What an encouragement is here afforded to presumptuous ignorance—to blind enthusiasm—and even to subtle hypocrisy!—If then naked morality be justly deemed an insufficient ground on which to rest our hopes of salvation, yet let us be careful to know what it is that we substitute in its room.—The virtues of morality, it is readily admitted, can then only stand on a solid ground, when they arise from a firm belief of the doctrines of the Gospel: but neither can those doctrines be fully understood, and rightly interpreted, without an accurate investigation of the writings which contain them. To this investigation, and with a view to the application that should be made of it, should be brought, if possible, a sound mind in the full use and exercise of its reasoning powers; accustomed to detect fallacies, combine facts, and draw just conclusions—an accurate acquaintance with history, ancient and modern, sacred and profane; and a critical knowledge of the original languages in which the oracles of God have been delivered. True indeed it is, that all this cannot be absolutely necessary to the faith of a Christian, because it is wholly out of the power of many to attain it. In those who are void of the advantages of education, and condemned perhaps to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, a disposition to listen to instruction, and to follow it, will be sufficient to supply the place of fuller knowledge. And it would be well if those who enjoy but partial and

limited

limited means of information, would be careful not to plunge beyond their depth, and neglect or pervert that clearer light which they are capable of receiving. But is there no difference between the teacher and the hearer? Ought not the former to be "thoroughly furnished to all good works,*" and enable himself, by every means in his power, to enlighten and inform the latter? And can he expect that he shall be fully equal to this by merely looking over his bible? Suppose him not to be deficient as to the main Articles of the Christian Faith, will he be able without proper care and application to place them in a just light before his hearers? To meet their prejudices, to remove their doubts, and to shew them the true connection between faith and practice, between a belief in the Gospel and a virtuous life? The bible indeed, and the doctrines contained in it, ought to be the principal object and ultimate end of our inquiries; we engage "to apply ourselves to this one thing, and draw all our cares and studies this way:†" but we cannot be understood thereby to forego all subsidiary attainments which may conduce to our right understanding of the Scriptures, and our skilful application of them to the respective capacities of those we have to deal with. With a view to our attainment of these qualifications, it is required of the candidates for orders, that they should, at a considerable expence, have previously gone through a course of

* 2 Tim. ch. iii. v. 17.

† Ordination Service.

of academical education; and particularly that they should avail themselves of the assistance which for some years past has been afforded them in the conduct of their ecclesiastical studies, by the lectures of able professors. A neglect of these advantages while we have them, or an inattention to preserve them afterwards, must render a Clergyman unfit to fulfil properly and fully the calls of his function. For want of this it is, that we are over-run with ignorant and self-sufficient teachers, handling the word of God deceitfully, and converting the milk of the Gospel into poison. There are, I fear, among these, some from whom better things might be expected: who, nurtured in the abode of science, and seasoned with the principles of genuine learning, are yet misled by their vanity, to catch at the applauses of a gaping multitude, and lose both themselves and their hearers in the mazes of wild enthusiasm. To such as these we must say with compassion and regret, "ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*" And surely it ought to make some impression upon them, to consider that they are making use of the same arts as are employed by the adversary with too much success. A pretence of extraordinary zeal for what they call the doctrines of the Gospel, has been made use of by many to supplant the humble and benevolent precepts of it: has been converted into a vehicle of practical immorality and licentious conduct; and thus easily worked to the

* Luke, ch. ix. v. 55.

the purposes of faction and sedition: When matters are got to this length, recourse must be had to the authority of the Civil Magistrate; and, I trust, it will be found, that ^{he} beareth not the sword in vain.* But I wish at present to call your attention to the steps which lead to these disorders; and to impress upon you a conviction how much it concerns you in your respective stations, to use your utmost endeavors, by a vigilant, though temperate conduct, to counteract the first principles of this mischief.

Let such then as feel themselves qualified to stand forth in the first ranks, exert themselves manfully in defence of that banner of Christ under which they are enlisted: but let not others despair of success in preserving their flocks from contagion, and driving away strange doctrines, by a steady and zealous application of their time and talents to the ordinary calls of their function, and a plain and sober exposition of the Holy Scriptures.

In thus diligently fulfilling the solemn and important charge committed to you, you may hope, under the blessing of God, to contribute in some degree towards the preservation of our countrymen from the contagion of those principles, which, on the Continent, have torn up the foundations of every civil and religious establishment; and the baneful influence of which, has not, I fear, been wholly unknown among us. We have, however,

* Rom. ch. xiii. v. 4.

however, the satisfaction to see, that in the long and arduous struggle we have been sustaining, the manly and persevering efforts of this country, have not only dispelled the approaching prospect of invasion from abroad, and insurrection at home, but, we may trust, have paved the way also for returning peace and tranquillity; and the restoration of the liberties of Europe. And while we acknowledge with becoming gratitude, the vigorous and seasonable exertions of those whose province it is to watch over the public welfare, we cannot, without the most heartfelt satisfaction, contemplate the zeal and ardor with which all ranks of people have voluntarily come forward, to assist in the defence and preservation of their country. In this truly patriotic contest, the Clergy have not been backward to manifest their spirit, and their attachment to the constitution which protects them. Nor can I withhold the tribute due to the younger part of them, who were desirous of affording their assistance by their personal service. I saw with pleasure the truly British spirit they manifested in the hour of alarm, by their willingness to engage for the partaking those dangers to which they thought their parishioners might be exposed. But I saw with still greater pleasure their ready acquiescence in the more difficult task of subduing that spirit, at the request of their superiors, who did not think that the time was yet come, which might justify the engrafting military services upon the more important duties of their function.

The event, God be thanked, seems to have justified their caution; and though it is by no means adviseable to relax our vigilance, or run any hazard of falling into a deceitful security; yet our attention may be less anxiously confined to one single object, and our ordinary duties fulfilled with less interruption. The Clergy, therefore, who in every crisis perhaps might have found some means of giving their assistance, equally useful, though less active and prominent than military commands, may now at least be content to confine themselves to their proper line; namely, to animate their fellow-citizens in the defence of their country—to impress upon them a due sense of the justice of their cause, and of the importance of its issue to their best interests;—and to point out to them the fallacious ground on which the temporary success of their enemies must be built, in avowed opposition to the God of Hosts. Let a sense of religion continue to be, as I trust it is, the mark of distinction between us and them, and we may have a confident hope that they cannot ultimately prevail. Indeed our present situation, viewed in a comparative light, calls for our utmost gratitude. The vigilance we have exerted, and the resources we have called forth, have, under God, placed us in a point of view which must afford the highest satisfaction to every true lover of his country. Undoubtedly the pressure upon individuals is great; sacrifices are called for by the exigencies of the State, much beyond those to which we have

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been accustomed. Yet even these appear to be submitted to without repining, from a due sense of the blessings which they are intended to preserve. A nation which has the good sense to know and to value these blessings, cannot be wholly void of a religious disposition. It is our business to improve these favorable symptoms, by showing ourselves serious in the task of cherishing and promoting that disposition, both by our example and our doctrine: and it deeply concerns us, both as Citizens and Christians, not to suffer that temperate and rational system of protestantism which we have so long enjoyed, to be corrupted through our ignorance, or fall into decay through our negligence and remissness.

May the God whom we profess to serve, strengthen us to support his cause, and render us the humble instruments of promoting his worship, and diffusing among mankind the blessed truths of the Gospel!

THE END.

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